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F R O M T H E N O R T H E R N C O U N T R I E S

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Director: Dr. Harry Johansson, Sigtuna, Sweden

Editor: Rev. Johs. Langhoff, Øster Egesborg per Kern, Denmark

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DENMARK

Danish Church Delegation Reports on Soviet Church.

On its return the Danish church delegation that visited the Soviet Union last month at the invitation of the synod of the Russian Orthodox Church has reported its impressions of Soviet church life in lectures and articles.

The very first evening the leader of the delegation Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard, D.D., Copenhagen, was interviewed on the radio, and here he told of the crowded churches the delegation had seen time after time and of the living faith of the simple Russian people. Of the relation between the State and the Russian Orthodox Church the Bishop said that in the fields where co-operation had been established this functioned satisfactorily. "During our visit we found confirmation of Dostojefski´s words that "the Russian people carry God in their hearts", said the Bishop, and he ended by stating that in his opinion the Russian Church had a great future before it.

The publication of a number of articles in various papers by members of the delegation gave rise to a lively discussion on the timeliness of such a visit by a delegation and of a number of points in the description of the situation of the Christian Church in the Soviet Union.

Besides visiting Moscow, Kiev, and Leningrad the delegation also went to Riga as guests of the Orthodox and Lutheran Churches, and here it had the opportunity of meeting some 25 students attending a short theological course which the Lutheran Church had just been given permission to establish. Since the War there has been no possibility of having regular courses for training pastors.

To the Metropolitan Nikolai in Moscow the delegation put forward a proposal from the theological faculty of the University of Copen-

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hagen for the exchange of students, and this proposal was well received. It was further agreed to effect an exchange of theological and church literature between the Orthodox Church in Russia and Denmark's Lutheran Church.

India's Christian Council sends greetings to Denmark's King.

The 250'th anniversary of the first Protestant Mission in India, the Tranquebar Mission, was especially celebrated in Denmark because it was the Danish King Frederik IV who in 1605 sent the first missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plütschau to Tranquebar.

In commemoration of the jubilee special services, at which collections were taken for mission work, were held throughout the country, and a special commemorative service was celebrated in the Cathedral at Copenhagen on the 250'th anniversary of the missionaries' departure. Among others present was the Minister of Church Affairs, Mrs. Bodil Koch. The chairman of the Danish Mission Council, Bishop Halfdan Høgsbro, D.D., preached and an Indian pastor Rev. Naran Soren, who was then visiting Denmark, also spoke.

In a telegram sent to the Danish King Frederik IX by the National Christian Council of India it is pointed out that it was one of the King's ancestors, who began the mission, and the telegram goes on to say:

"We rejoice with your Majesty at the growth of the Church of Jesus Christ in India, and we thank God for the constant guidance of the Holy Spirit and for one generation after another of zealous missionaries who have come to India from your country in these years."

The Council likewise sent a telegram to the Bishop of Copenhagen Dr. H. Fuglsang-Damgaard. Bishop Høgsbro and the Secretary of the Mission Council Rev. C. Rendtorff were received in audience by the King, who was presented with a beautifully bound book on the Tranquebar Mission. Representatives of the Mission Council had earlier placed a laurel wreath on Frederik IV's sarcophagus in Roskilde Cathedral.

Danish Missionary Bishop in Pakistan.

In December the Danish missionary in Pakistan rev. Jens Christensen was ordained as bishop for the Lutheran Church in Pakistan, which has been established by Danish and American congregations working together. The Swedish Mission's Bishop in South India Johs. Sandegren officiated at the ordination, which took place in Risalpur south of Mardan. Present as a representative of the Lutheran National Church in Denmark was Bishop Gudmund Schiøler, Roskilde, who on behalf of the Danish bishops presented the new bishop with a pectoral cross carved in wood from the Holy Land with gilt edges.

In connection with the establishment of the Church a constitution for the Lutheran Church in Pakistan has been drawn up. A synod has been elected consisting of 6 Pakistanees and 6 foreigners and led by an executive committee with the bishop as chairman.

New Law on State Aid for the Building of Churches.

In the Danish Parliament the Minister of Church Affairs Mrs. Bodil Koch has proposed an ammendment of the Act on the building of churches

which would make it much easier to meet the conditions for building new churches. Until now the State has given grants covering half the cost for the erection of new churches outside the capital, but only on the condition that the other half had been collected by voluntary contributions so that every church was free of debt right from its dedication. The new proposal is that a State grant of half the cost can also be obtained for the erection of new churches in the capital, and that only a quarter of the total sum must have been collected through voluntary contributions while the remaining fourth may now be raised as a loan.

The bill has been received with understanding by all the political parties and is expected to be passed in the near future.

Organized Laymen's Visits in Copenhagen.

A Copenhagen church, the Absalon Church, has begun to organize laymen's visits patterned on German and American experiments. Lay members of the congregation pay visits to homes in the parish giving invitations to attend services in the church and speaking with people about their attitude towards the Church and Christianity. The new initiative has been well received, and other congregations in Copenhagen are at present discussing the possibility of a similar effort.

Danish Pastor Lutheran Secretary of Minority Churches.

Rector Mogens Zeuthen, Krogsbølle, has been appointed to serve as secretary for the minority churches under the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva from January 1st. He succeeds Dr. J. Igor Bella.

Gallup Poll of Church Attendance in Denmark.

The Danish Gallup Institute has made a poll of church attendance in Denmark from which it appears that only 3% of the population go to church every Sunday, whereas 21% listen to the service over the wireless every Sunday. 15% go to church now and then, and 27% hear the radio services now and then. Christmas Eve, which is the largest church festival, about 80% of the population gather either in the churches or around their wireless sets for the services, but here too the development in recent years has been in favour of the wireless, so that just as many people sit around the wireless that evening as are gathered in the churches.

FINLAND

Extensive Family Counselling by the Church in Finland.

The Finnish Lutheran National Church's Family Counselling can now look back on 10 years of activity with many good results. The initiative was taken by Pastor Matti Joensuu, who began giving marriage counselling as early as 1944. The following year a centre for church counselling including marriage counselling was established, and to-day the Helsinki (Helsingfors) Family Counselling Bureau alone has a doctor of theology as leader and 5 pastors and 10 laymen as assistants. In all, the Bureau has tried to help 5500 couples.

The background for the Bureau's activity was the great number of devorces right after the War. Whereas the number of divorces in the 20's was on an average 680 a year, in 1946 the figure rose to over 5000. Many marriages that were hastily formed in the War years were quickly dissolved, often because of unfaithfulness while the two were forced to live far apart. At the same time many people were estranged from the Church and hostile to the moral traditions.

The Church's family counselling has seen many positive results of its attempts to help couples in various ways, and it has probably contributed to bringing the annual number of divorces down to 3400 a year.

New Finnish Pastor among the Finns in Sweden.

There are at present some 60.000 Finns in Sweden. Ever since the Reformation there has been a Finnish congregation in Stockholm, which has formed the centre for church work among the Finns in Sweden. In addition to the pastor here rev. Gottfrid Sevelius, there is a Finnish pastor in Central Sweden, and to this office the rev. Iivari Räniä has recently been appointed. Since 1950 there has been a Finnish welfare worker in Stockholm, and lastly the Swedish National Church pays Dean S.J. Laurikkala, who works as a pastor among the emigrants from Ingermannland in Sweden.

Finland has 230 Women with Theological Degrees.

At present there are in Finland no less than 230 women with a degree in theology. Of these about half are teachers in public schools, 20 are doing missionary work in Africa, 40 are married to pastors, and 33 are employed by the Church as leaders of work among girls, young people, and women. In Helsinki (Helsingfors) alone 25 of these women are employed by the congregations. Finally some are active in various Christian organizations.

At the synod in 1954 a committee was appointed to deal with the question of women's position in the service of the Church, and this committee under the chairmanship of Professor Aimo T. Nikolainen is expected to give its report some time this year. Professor Nikolainen has just completed a treatise on the pastoral office in the New Testament which is to be incorporated in the report.

ICELAND

Iceland's Church Jubilee Commemorated by Special Stamp Issue.

This month the Icelandic Post Office will issue a new series with 3 values to commemorate the 900'th anniversary of the ordination of the first Icelandic bishop. The stamps will be issued with a surcharge, the proceeds of which will be given to the fund for the erection of a church in Skálholt, Iceland's old episcopal residence and cultural centre. The values of the stamps will be 0.75, 1.25, and 1.75 kr. The stamps bear the pictures of Skálholt's old cathedral, long since pulled down, and of two of the most famous Icelandic bishops.

The Skálholt-committee, who are planning the celebration of the jubilee, have proclaimed Sunday July 1st the official Day of Jubilee.

NORWAY

Optimistic New Year's Evaluation of the Church's Situation in Norway.

"To me 1955 is the year when things really began to grow so that it could be seen and heard." With these words Bishop Johs. Smemo began his New Year's statement to the Christian daily "Vårt Land", and the optimism expressed in the Bishop's evaluation of the situation is also evident in other New Year statements by churchmen.

The Bishop said that it was an almost unanimous experience that openness to the Church's message to-day was great and resistance remarkably small, if only one succeeded in approaching people in the right way. As one of the bright points in the past year he pointed out that the National Church as such, and not only the voluntary Church organizations, has felt it an imperative duty to establish contact with the many people who have become estranged from the Church, and it has sought to solve this problem through congregational campaigns which have so far been made in Oslo and its suburbs (see C.N. No. 12). Bishop Smemo further rejoiced that the first joint meeting of the diocesan councils held in Oslo last November was characterized by a will to co-operate in the tasks now before the Church. One result of this willingness to co-operate was the establishment of a joint church institute to train leaders and activate Christian laymen.

Corresponding to the tone of the Bishop's statement, "Vårt Land" called a leading article in its New Year's edition "Improved Balance-sheet", and weekly "Vår Kirke" calls its New Year's survey "A good year for the Church".

Discussion of Pastor Forbech's Stalin Prize.

Shortly before Christmas the Stalin Prize for 1955 was awarded by the International Committee for Peace in Moscow, and among the recipients was the Norwegian pastor Ragnar Forbech, Oslo. Pastor Forbech is chairman of the Norwegian Christian League for Peace, vice-chairman of Norway's Christian Workers' Union and a member of the World Council for Peace.

The news that he had been awarded the Stalin Prize started a lively discussion, not least in Church circles. Thus Dr. Per Lønning called on Pastor Forbech in an open letter to renounce the Stalin Prize because his acceptance of it would "be a stab in the back of millions of fellow-Christians", i.e. all Christians in Communist countries, who believe it a Christian duty to fight against the Marxist ideology of Communism. Dr. Lønning referred especially to the situation in East Germany where Communism and the Church are fighting for the soul of the coming generation. Pastor Forbech replied that he gladly received the Stalin Peace

Prize, and that in his opinion the very fact that it was a pastor who received this prize would be a cause for rejoicing to the great majority of Christians behind the Eastern "Iron Curtain".

In his acknowledgement to the Stalin-Prize committee Pastor Forbech said that the award had given rise to "attacks from reactionary forces, but that the great majority of our people rejoice at the award. The champions of peace in Norway were convinced that this award would greatly stimulate the work for peace and friendship between the nations".

After the publication of this letter Bishop Johs. Smemo, Oslo, has reproached Pastor Forbech for using the expression "the champions of peace" of himself and those who follow him, while characterizing those who think differently as "reactionary forces". The Bishop also protests against Pastor Forbech's evaluation of the people's reaction, claiming that "the Norwegian people did not show joy, but uneasiness, wonder and to some extent even stronger feelings".

Preparations for Closer Co-operation between the Free Churches.

The Norwegian Dissenter Council, which comprises 6 Free Churches, including the Methodists, the Baptists, the Mission Covenant Church, and the Pentecostal Mission, is to assemble in February for its ordinary meeting held every third year. Negotiations will be focussed on two questions, the repeal of the present Dissenter Act and giving Free Churchmen the right to impart religious education in the primary schools where present legislation permits only members of the Lutheran National Church to teach.

In continuation of the meeting of the Dissenter Council a meeting for representatives from all the Free Churches wishing to participate will be held. This meeting is to form a prelude to closer co-operation between the Free Churches. A proposal will be made for holding an annual meeting of Free Church leaders at which both spiritual and practical questions can be discussed, and likewise a national convention of Free Churches every other year or so.

The board of the Dissenter Council, whose chairman is Dr. Alf Lier, recently appealed to the Ministry of Justice for the appointment of a special committee to consider the question of repealing the Dissenter Act, and the ministry of Justice as well as the Ministry of Church Affairs have reacted favourably to the appeal.

The Mormon Church not Recognized as a Free Church.

An application from the Mormon congregation in Oslo that it be recognized as a body of dissenters with the right to perform wedding ceremonies and to keep church registers recognized by the civil authorities has not been granted by State authorities. The refusal is accounted for on the grounds that the Mormon congregation does not fulfil the conditions for recognition laid down in the Dissenter Act.

The refusal must be seen on the background of the declaration made by the National Lutheran bishops' assembly in 1954 to the effect that the Mormon Church could not be considered a Christian body. The Mormons' right freely to practise their religion in Norway is in no way affected by this decision.

Norwegian Bill on the Admission of Women to Holy Orders.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Halvard Lange, has stated in Parliament that the Norwegian Government intends to introduce a Bill this year ammending the Act of 1938 on the admission of women to State office on an equal footing with men. The Bill proposes the ommission of the paragraph stating that women cannot be appointed as pastors if the parochial church council opposes it on grounds of principle.

At the same time the Government will introduce a Bill to ratify the U.N.'s convention of 1952 on women's political rights. This convention was signed in 1953 by Norway with a reservation as to women's admission to holy orders in the National Church. But now it is desired to ratify the convention without reservation.

In connection with the proposed Bill the Government has asked the Ministry for Church Affairs to obtain statements from the 9 bishops on their views. It turns out that two bishops, i.e. Kr. Schjelderup, Hamar, and Alf Wiig, Tromsø, approve the repeal of the paragraph, whereas the other 7 feel that the congregations should still have the right to decide whether they want women pastors or not.

The Christian daily "Vårt Land" in Oslo points out that the great majority of people in the National Church are opposed to women pastors, advocating that the reservation connected with the Act on the admission of women to holding State office be detached from its present connection, but at the same time incorporated in church legislation.

There are 32 women with theological degrees in Norway, but none of these have so far asked for ordination. However, a theological candidate Miss Agnes Vold has been appointed for the last 4-5 years to give spiritual guidance at the large Ullevål hospital in Oslo with the right to administer the sacraments.

Bill Against Pornographic Magazines under Consideration.

The Norwegian Ministry of Justice has asked the Council on Criminal Law to consider the taking of more rigorous measures against pornographic literature, and it is expected that as soon as the Council's recommendations have been made, the Ministry will introduce a Bill for more rigorous legislation in this line.

The number of more or less pornographic papers and magazines has increased considerably in the last few years, and the Church several times has called for the authorities to intervene against this speculation in man's lowest instincts.

Difficulties with the Division of Parishes in Oslo.

Oslo is a rapidly growing city, and to effect proper church care of the population in the now very large parishes, a division of the parishes in several places is now urgently required. A plan has been drawn up for the establishment of 7 new livings in the capital, but the plan has been laid aside for several months because of disagreement between the Ministry of Church Affairs and the Municipality of Oslo as to who should pay the new pastors their salaries. Until now such salaries have been paid by the

Municipality, but it now claims that there is no legal authority for this practice.

Now the Ministry of Church Affairs has appointed a committee to work out clearer regulations as to the sharing of expenses between State and Municipality when parishes are divided, and the matter will probably soon be arranged so that the planned divisions can be brought into effect.

Wider Authority to be Given to the Synod?

That the highest representation in the Swedish Lutheran National Church, the Synod, should in future assemble every 3rd year instead of every 5th year as at present, and that it should be given wider authority in various fields, are suggestions put forward by a committee appointed by the Synod of 1951 to deal with the Synod's constitutional powers.

The committee's report fills no [illegible] pages and makes a number of concrete suggestions. With regard to questions of an internal and religious nature, such as questions of doctrine, forms of church service, manuals, etc., it is suggested that these should no longer be decided by the Government alone, but by the Government and the Synod together. As to alterations in Church Legislation the committee suggests several elucidative rules concerning the division of authority between the Synod and Parliament, but no important changes in present regulations.

The suggestion that the Synod should assemble every 3rd year and that the members should be elected for 3 years as against 1 year at present, is founded on the wish of making the Synod's work more effective, and a change of this kind will of course also strengthen the position of the Synod.

Committee to Exert Christian Influence in Political Life.

A good deal of interest has been aroused in Sweden by the appointment of a committee of personalities from the National Church as well as from the Free Churches with the express purpose of exerting influence on legislation and on political life as a whole.

The initiative behind the appointment of the committee was taken by the Bishop in the National Church Sven Danell of Skara and the leader of the Pentecostal Mission Pastor Lewi Pethrus. Last December they invited about 30 leading men from the National and Free Churches to a closed meeting to discuss the matter.

In a press interview Bishop Danell states that he is rather sceptical as to the idea of forming a special Christian party, but at the same time he feels that there is a great need for stronger Christian influence within the existing parties. At the meeting it was decided that before the next elections to Parliament, the committee should appeal to the parties to give more room for the nomination of Christian candidates.

Bishop Danell points out that the reason for this initiative is the increasing dechristianizing of society and the dissolution of moral standards. As examples of the need for Christian influence on legislation, the Bishop cites that religious instruction in the schools has been increasingly pushed aside, that the sacredness of marriage is being undermined, and that pornography and serial booklets based on the principle that might is right are being printed in larger and larger editions.

First Catholic Convent Established in Sweden.

In Huddinge near Stockholm the first Catholic convent in modern times will be consecrated in the near future. From April 1st Belgian nuns of the Carmelite Order will take possession of this new Catholic centre.

Until the Religious Freedom Act was passed in 1952 the Catholics were not allowed to establish convents, but this is now possible subject to the Government's approval.

The Catholic Bishop Johannes Ericus Müller claims that the number of Catholics in Sweden has been increasing rapidly since the War on account of the stream of refugees and workers from Catholic countries who have come to Sweden in the post-War years. There are only 6-7000 Swedish citizens who are Catholics, but the number of foreigners belonging to this faith lies between 12.000 and 15.000. There are 55 Catholic priests, of which 6 are Swedes, while the rest represent 13 other nations. There are also 150 nuns or sisters in various Catholic institutions all over the country.

Swedish Baptist Leaders invited to the Soviet Union.

The Swedish Baptist Leaders have been invited by the Russian Baptist Church to pay a 3-weeks visit to the Soviet Union, and the invitation has been gratefully accepted by the mission committee of the Swedish Baptist Society.

It was suggested that the delegation come around New Year, but for various reasons, i.a. the illness of one of the delegates, the delegation has asked to be allowed to come a little later. The delegation will consist of Mr. Ruben Svedberg, member of Parliament, mission director Nils Rudén, mission secretary Eric Strutz, Professor Gunnar Westin, the editor Mr. Arvid Svärd, and Pastor Joel Sørenson.

400 German Children Arrive in Sweden for 3 Months' Recreation.

At present the Swedish Pentecostal Mission has 400 children from Berlin on recreation in Sweden. The children who are invited through West Berlin municipal authorities, are to stay in Sweden for three months.

Tangier Radio to Broadcast Programmes to African Mission Fields.

In the near future the Swedish Pentecostal Mission's broadcasting station in Tangier, EIAR radio, will begin transmitting to the mission fields in Africa. Most of the programmes will be broadcast in Kiswahili, an African language spoken by about 70

million Africans. The missionaries are to arrange part of the programmes.

This information was given by the leader of the Swedish Pentecostal Mission, Pastor Lewi Pethrus, in connection with the presentation of the radio station's studios in Stockholm, which have cost 1.2 million Swedish crowns.

Pastor Pethrus states that the period of transmission is now 4 hours and 45 minutes a day, but that this can probably be lengthened. An investigation shows that in Sweden alone 1/2 million people listen to the transmissions.

New Year's Eve a special programme was broadcast from Tangier including a New Year's greeting from Prime Minister Tage Erlander.

Criticism of the Religious Element in Swedish Television.

The Free Church daily "Svenska Morgonbladet" has launched a rather sharp attack against the Swedish television programmes claiming that they make far too little use of the possibilities available for proclaiming the Christian message. Since television transmissions began, i.e. since October 29, 1954, there have been only 4 transmissions of this nature, 3 services and 1 discussion, and even then the form of these transmissions was not beyond reproach, claims a leading article. The paper strongly advocates that a special leader be appointed to take over the Christian programmes in television.

In connection with this criticism it should be stated that the daily transmissions on television so far only last for one hour.

Bishop Nygren writes book on Ecumenical Theology.

Bishop Anders Nygren of Lund, former chairman of the Lutheran World Federation, has had a book published with the title "Christ and His Church". The book is an attempt to sketch "the background for the theology of ecumenicity", and seeks to define the relation between Christ and the Church as a basis for the problem of the relations between the Christian churches.

Bishop Nygren's book will undoubtedly be of importance to the ecumenical debate in Sweden as well as in other countries.

Spiritual Hunger in the Midst of Secularization.

At the same time that much is being said about the growing secularization in Sweden, there are signs of "a spiritual hunger" in many parts of the country. This was recently pointed out by "Sydsvenska Dagbladet", which cited the fact that the University Extension lectures with the largest attendance at Lund were those dealing with the philosophy of life.

This impression is supported by the fact that among the students at Uppsala there has been a noticeable rise in attendance at the special student services, about 10% of all students taking part, and that ordinary church attendance is also improving in many places.

Christian Meetings and Prayer Rooms in Shopping-centre.

A large modern shopping-centre recently built at Luleå has room for Christian meetings and services, and when the next section of the large block is completed it will contain a prayer-room for the customers.

The services and meetings are held in a large hall with a capacity of 3000, and already the first Sunday after the opening of the centre the first meeting was held by the Salvation Army. Since then other Christian bodies in the town have used the hall.

Before fitting up the prayer-room, the shopping-centre's management will negotiate with the various church denominations represented in the town, and these will in turn lead the devotions in the shopping-centre.

Free Churches Plan Joint Theological Institute.

The Free Churches in Sweden have decided to join together in establishing a theological institute as a continuation of each denomination's already existing schools for preachers. The only large Free Church that did not wish to join is the Pentecostal Mission, whose leader Pastor Lewi Pethrus recently stated that the Pentecostal Mission's keeping aloof from every kind of preachers' training as a matter of principle has been the Mission's strength and one of the reasons for its progress.